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Bronislaw Geremek, Who Helped End Communist Control of Poland, Is Dead at 76

By **NICHOLAS KULISH**

Bronislaw Geremek, a pivotal figure in the fight to end Communist rule in Poland and one of the leading statesmen of the democratic era that followed, died on Sunday. He was 76.

He was killed in a car accident, Reuters reported, quoting the police in western Poland. The Associated Press said that Mr. Geremek's wife died in 2004 and that he is survived by two sons.

In a lifetime of enormous achievement, Mr. Geremek's greatest contribution may have been as one of the leaders of the round-table negotiations that helped pave the way for elections in 1989 that eventually brought the Solidarity movement to power, initiating a peaceful end to Communist control of Poland.

This negotiated change of power provided a template for other countries in the Warsaw Pact and, in the years since, far beyond. Mr. Geremek's role in the talks made him one of the shepherds of what he himself called the "nonviolent passage from the totalitarian regime to democratic liberties." Mr. Geremek later served as Poland's foreign minister, from 1997 to 2000. At the time of his death he was a member of the European Parliament.

The very picture of the bearded, pipe-smoking academic, Mr. Geremek was a historian who specialized in medieval France.

His life, and the future of Poland, took a striking turn when he and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a future prime minister, drove to Gdansk in August 1980 with a statement signed by 64 leading intellectuals in support of the striking workers at the famous Lenin Shipyard.

Lech Walesa, the leader of Solidarity, the independent trade union movement, asked them to stay and become advisers to the workers. The cooperation of intellectuals and workers was a key factor in making Solidarity such an unusually powerful force for change. Mr. Geremek was imprisoned for his efforts by the Communist government when martial law was imposed in December 1981.

The fall of the Berlin Wall provided such a potent, tangible symbol of the end of Communist hegemony in Eastern Europe that it has become easy to forget the leading role that the Solidarity movement in Poland played in breaking down the aura of invincibility of the authoritarian regimes of the Warsaw Pact. Solidarity ultimately paved the way for freedom and the integration into Western institutions of former Soviet satellites and even former Soviet republics.

In June 1989, after Solidarity's strong showing in the elections that grew out of the round-table talks, Mr. Geremek said: "The winds of history have normally blown against us Poles. Finally they are blowing in our

direction."

When Solidarity entered Parliament the following month, Mr. Geremek was the movement's parliamentary leader. Known as a pragmatist, he was someone who searched out compromise in difficult times. There was much uncertainty in the early years, whether it involved fears over a unified Germany or the attempted coup in the Soviet Union.

Born Jewish in Warsaw, Mr. Geremek survived the Holocaust, escaping from the Warsaw ghetto when he was 11 and remaining in hiding until the end of the war. His father died at Auschwitz.

Mr. Geremek joined the Communist Polish United Workers Party, but he resigned in protest in 1968 after the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

In an interview with The New York Times in 1998, Mr. Geremek said he had not considered leaving Poland during an anti-Jewish campaign in 1968. "If I don't like the policy in my country," he said, "I have to change it."

Because of the political developments he helped to bring about, Mr. Geremek had the opportunity to take part in all-but-unimaginable changes for Poland, including negotiations to join the European Union when he was foreign minister. He served as head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1998 and signed the documents that formally marked Poland's accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

"Poland forever returns to where she has always belonged: the free world," Mr. Geremek said at the ceremony marking the country's entrance into NATO in Independence, Mo., in March 1999.

Timothy Garton Ash, the author of "The Polish Revolution: Solidarity," met Mr. Geremek in 1980 at the birth of Solidarity, and they became friends. "He was one of the most important political brains of the end of Communism in Europe altogether," Mr. Garton Ash said.

"He could be extremely statesmanlike and formal and awe-inspiring," Mr. Garton Ash recalled in a telephone interview on Sunday. "He could also be extremely funny and irreverent and tell some very good jokes."

Speaking with the columnist Anthony Lewis in 1988, Mr. Geremek said a book he had written on medieval France could not be published because Polish Communist authorities objected to but a single word in the whole work. Asked what the word was, he replied: "Geremek."